

## Osawgenong, a Sac tradition /

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### OSAWGENONG—A SAC TRADITION. BY GEORGE JOHNSTON.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Johnston, a half-breed educated Chippewa, and brother of the first wife of Henry R. Schoolcraft, communicated this tradition from Grand Haven Bay, Lake Michigan, early in 1845, to the New York Historical Society. It was derived from a well-known Chippewa Chief, Esquagonaba, or Honored Feather, and noted down as he related it.— L. C. Draper.

*Osawgenong* : The land of the Sacs, and from whence the river derives its name, signifying the sortie of the Foxes or Sacs.

That region of country was inhabited in early times by the Sacs, from whence they made incursions along the coasts of Lakes Huron and Michigan, committing warfare on the Chippewas and carrying away captives. They were finally driven from Saginaw Bay by their enemies, and they formed a village at L'Arbre Croche on the borders of Lake Michigan, previous to the period when the Ottawas migrated from the Manitowlin island of Lake Huron to Old Mackinac. The Sacs committing depredations upon the Ottawas, were repulsed by them from their village at *Wahganahkezie* on L'Arbre Croche, from which country they crossed Lake Michigan and established themselves near the mouth of Fox River upon the lake shore near Green Bay settlement. At this point they grew numerous, and powerful, and more merciless; burning their enemies when they took them prisoners in war, upon scaffolds elevated from the ground and erected for that purpose. When a subject was obtained to be burnt, it was customary on these occasions to require the prisoner to name the principal chiefs and head men of their tribe in order that they might be burnt in effigy and 449 suffer with the victim. This ceremony being performed, the fire was then kindled. At one time an Ottawa and his wife were held prisoners by the Sacs, and the man was brought to the stake; but his heart failing him, he was observed to shed

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tears, and the laugh of derision went through the circle of the standers by. His wife, on observing this, said to her husband, "You cause them to rejoice the more, and to look upon your weakness with glutting pleasure." After having so said, she threw off her mantle and ascended the pile, and making the war-whoop of defiance she was tied to the stake, and she was then required to name the principal chiefs of her tribe and the most consequential men of her village. She replied that she would not do so, but would name the principal Sac chief, pointing him with her finger, and said to him that she had six brothers who would revenge her death. She then resumed her death song, and occasionally giving the defying war whoop. Thus she expired exulting over her enemies.

This event soon reached the ears of her brothers, and the eldest, whose name was Nangodook, immediately prepared a war wampum belt, with the war pipe and stem, and forwarded it to the different bands of Indians bordering upon the Lakes Michigan, Huron, and Superior. The Indians thus invited readily accepted the proposition made to them by Nangodook, and soon after this an immense number of canoes, filled with warriors, were seen to arrive and land at Nangodook's village. When all the warriors had arrived, they immediately embarked in their canoes and proceeded to the Sac village, situated near the Fox River upon the lake shore, and on reaching a sandy bay near the Sac village, Nangodook, who was the principal partisan and leader, made a halt, and they drew up their canoes, securing them in the woods. From this point they marched through the forest, and encircling the Sac village in part, waited for the dawn of day to make the attack; the warriors took their seats on the ground, and lit their pipes to smoke. On a height, back of the invading party, lay a Sac woman, who had quarreled in the early part of 30 450 the night with her husband, and had retired to that spot to weep away her vexation, and had there fallen asleep. On waking up, she smelt the fumes of tobacco and of the smoking weed, and on more particular observation, she discovered beneath the eminence she was on, a circular light resembling the light emanating from the firefly. The winding of the road led her from the war-party, and she entered the village without having been discovered. On entering her lodge, she awoke the family and communicated the facts of having seen

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a circular light, and having smelt the fumes of the *Ahpahcoosegan*.<sup>1</sup> But all the family, knowing the circumstances under which she had made her exit from the lodge in the early part of the night, laughed at her disdainfully, and reproached her for her temper. With this, and the ill treatment she had received from her husband, all blended together, caused her to blush and be more enraged. She wrapped herself in her blanket, and laying herself down, soon went to sleep. The dawn of day soon made its appearance, and Nangodook with his party made a furious onset on the village. The Sacs thus taken by surprise and in their sleep were killed in great numbers, but they defended themselves obstinately all day. Towards evening they apprised the invading party, by their heralds proclaiming that their principal chief, Ahkeenandodang, had been slain, and they wished that hostilities should cease until the following morning, when they would again renew the conflict. Nangodook consented, and he and his party slept on the battle ground. On the following morning at the dawn of day, Nangodook's heralds proclaimed that they were ready to commence hostilities; but they received no answer from the Sacs, all was still as death. On further investigation, they discovered that all of the remaining Sacs had fled. Thus the Sac village, where human sacrifices had been offered and burnt at the stake, was now leveled to the ground. Naugodook was not satisfied with this signal revenge, but he and his party be took themselves

1 The arbutus, or strawberry tree.—L. C. D.

451 to their canoes and pursued the fugitives, and overtook them at another Sac village at the *Butte des Morts* on Fox River, and near the mouth of Wolf River. At this village another action took place, and nearly the whole of the Sacs were killed. A small remnant fled across the portage of the Wisconsin, and went down that stream to the Mississippi, from whence they continued their flight to the Osage country, and supplicated refuge there; but the Osages, doubting their fidelity, refused them protection, and forcibly repulsed them upon the Missouri River. The Sacs here formed rafts, and many perished in the waters,

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leaving but a few families to lament their fate, and these few families winding their way up the Mississippi to Dubuque's [Mines]. From this point they again sprang into a tribe.